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**"I think there's no chance that they will be able to overthrow the government in the resistance, you have perhaps 15,000 men. They can't go into the cities, which the govern-**

## Nicaraguan solution: government in exile?

ment is protecting with tanks and 75,000 men. ... So they're not going to overthrow that government." — William Casey, director, Central Intelligence Agency, U.S. News & World Report interview, April 23, 1984.

Mr. Casey was, of course, speaking of the odds against the Nicaraguan Democratic Front's overthrowing the Sandinista dictatorship. Since then, the odds have mounted alarmingly, to judge by administration reports of an increasing flow of Soviet weapons to the Sandinistas.

A single battle last December illustrates how devastating Soviet weaponry has become in the Nicaraguan fighting. A 300-man FDN guerrilla force was routed by Soviet-made Mi8 and Mi24 helicopter gunships, leaving 30 dead — a 10 percent casualty rate — in a matter of two hours.

Mr. Casey's fears have been echoed by our generals, notably Gen. Paul Gorman, who, while commander-in-chief of the U.S. Southern Command, deliberately overstepped the bounds of the traditional civilian-military relationship to warn that the FDN could not defeat the Sandinistas militarily "in the foreseeable future."

The administration, notwithstanding the opinion of these and other intelligence and military experts, appears to believe that additional military aid to the FDN can defeat the Sandinistas. That is the implication, at least, of the \$70 million in covert lethal aid, and \$30 million in non-lethal aid for the freedom fighters the president seeks of the Congress. But if the experts are right, then the emphasis on military aid is questionable, unless it is placed in a larger context.

Until that is done, however, the aid package should be supported to the hilt as the only means available at present to put pressure upon the Sandinistas.

The administration, however, has yet to declare unequivocally that its goal is to overthrow the Sandinista dictatorship.

The administration's waffling — to use the right word — on Nicaragua is understandable ... up to a point. As long as it recognizes the Sandinista regime as the legitimate government of Nicaragua, it cannot very well admit that it wants to overthrow it. Therefore, it cannot engage in an all-out military effort to accomplish that objective and request from Congress the necessary funds to do so. Nor can it even funnel to the FDN, in the open and aboveboard fashion a government confident of the rightness of its position should adopt, the minimum funds it is now requesting of the Congress. (For that matter, the \$70 million is not clearly earmarked for lethal aid but is to be used, the administration says, "for any kind of assistance [the president] deems appropriate.")

The situation being so murky, why doesn't the administration adopt the honest — and in the long run, only effective — policy of breaking off diplomatic relations with a regime we abhor, and extending recognition, instead, to the democratic opposition we are compelled to assist surreptitiously? Why not, in other words, encourage the United Nicaraguan Opposition, which encompasses not only the FDN but almost all exiled Nicaraguan democratic groups, to constitute itself as a government in exile?

There are many precedents for such a policy. The most pertinent is Jimmy Carter's withdrawal of recognition from the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, and his prompt recognition of a Sandinista junta in exile. And there are, of course, the many precedents of free governments in exile we recognized during World War II.

The establishment of a Free Nicaragua Government in Exile would dispose of many problems we, and also our Central American neighbors, face in dealing with the anti-Sandinista insurgency. In the first place, the question of our goals and the means of attaining them would be immediately clarified: our support of the exile government would free us from any compunctions about seeking the Sandinistas' overthrow. By the same token, it would allow us to extend to the exiles whatever military aid they might require to accomplish that objective,

and to do so openly, not covertly, since we would be no longer supporting a secret guerrilla operation but a belligerent in a civil war. If it is the right of a friendly government to seek our military assistance as an expression of the will of its people,

Congress can hardly deny that right by refusing to aid it.

Above all, the establishment of a Free Nicaraguan Government would rid many Americans of the perception that the struggle against the Sandinistas is purely military, and of their fear that we may become directly involved in the Central American conflict. Those twin concerns should be paramount in the calculations of an administration reputedly attuned to the public mood; but alas, it has thus far failed to address them. And so they remain to inhibit policy.

The underlying assumption of an exile government is that it would not only prosecute the war but also prosecute the peace. That is to say, it would project to the Nicaraguan people, and to the world in general, an image of the kind of society it would establish in Nicaragua: a representative democracy under a pluralistic political system that would allow free expression to everyone, and a mixed economy in which private enterprise would be permitted to flourish alongside whatever modest role it may be necessary for the state to assume.

The Free Nicaraguan Government in Exile would project, in short, a program that embraces political, economic, and social concepts as well as military objectives. The military aspect of the anti-Sandinista crusade that now dominates all thinking — on the part of its supporters and opponents alike — would be seen as a part of a balanced whole. Thus the crusade itself would acquire a broader dimension, as primarily political rather than military, and so generate wider appeal among both Nicaraguans and foreigners, especially Americans.

Would the rest of Central America support a free Nicaraguan exile government? That depends, first and foremost, upon the depth of the U.S. commitment to the idea. To be meaningful, our commitment would have to go beyond supporting such a government. On the premise that the Sandinista problem is regional in scope, Washington must regard the solution to it in regional terms. That means viewing the Free Nicaraguan Government idea as but one segment, however vital, of a broader policy designed to further the peace and progress of all Central America.

Specifically, the United States should

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should underwrite a program of economic, social, political, and military aid to include Nicaragua's four neighbors — Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras — besides the proposed Free Nicaraguan Government in Exile. Those four should be encouraged to band together in some kind of union — a United Central American Organization, as the writer has previously suggested in these pages — which would take steps to revive the economies of each country and to restore intraregional trade while moving toward regional economic integration. They recognize, as does Washington, that none of Central America's tiny economies, lacking basic resources such as oil, can ever become viable acting on its own. They must be brought together in some sort of economic union, beginning with a common market — an experiment which was tried before and failed essentially because of the absence of U.S. leadership — if the people of the area are to prosper in peace and freedom.

To be credible, the U.S. commitment to a United Central America Organization, and through it a Free Nicaraguan Government in Exile, should extend well beyond the life of the present administration. I repeat a suggestion I made, in an earlier article for *The Washington Times*, that we sign a Treaty of Mutual Cooperation, Assistance, and Defense with the UCAO's four members to last for 20 years: the Nicaraguan exile government should also be a signatory to it. Two decades should give the Central Americans ample time

to heal their wounds and establish the basis for a healthy economic and political system.

In the same article, I proposed that the UCAO invite the Sandinistas to join in, provided they agreed to establish real freedom and democracy in Nicaragua and also welcomed the reintegration of the exiles into Nicaraguan society. But that seems no longer possible, since the Sandinistas have hardened their position to the point of no return. Still, the UCAO might make a gesture in that direction, in order to clear the air, but give Managua a short time-limit to respond.

Indeed, time is of the essence. To gain Senate approval, which is all the treaty would need to become effective, the administration would have to act at once: in November, the Republicans might lose their majority in that body. The failure of the Contadora peacemaking process could meanwhile spread disillusion throughout Central America.

Such a program should have particular appeal for Congress, as it begins to debate the administration's \$100 million aid package. Congressional liberals would have severe pangs of conscience about voting against the Central American equivalent of motherhood and apple pie. But the administration, to ensure liberal backing, would of course have to incorporate something like the UCAO-Free Nicaraguan Government proposal in its present package soonest.

Each day that passes without a resolution of the Central American conflict enhances the danger of war.

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